



LINGUISTIC IDENTITY IN AN INVADIED LAND

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ABSTRACT

Chhotanagpur Adivasi regions of India coincide with the natural resource regions. With setting up of first Iron-steel plant and associated coal mining, the Chhotanagpur region got exposure to the world of industrialization in India. People from outside also came owing to available agricultural land, providing specialized services (ritualistic) and charity services to the early settlers. These factors in combination resulted in interaction of the region with the outside world. The present paper attempts to map the processes of making and unmaking of such multilingual environ that is based on intermingling and interactions across groups of speakers, promoters, and researchers with different levels of power at their disposal. The work is rooted in the framework (Bucholtz and Hall 2005) that takes identity as produced in linguistic interaction, based on the following principles: (1) identity is the product rather than the source of linguistic and other semiotic practices and therefore is a social and cultural rather than primarily internal psychological phenomenon; (2) identities are relationally constructed through several, often overlapping, aspects of the relationship between self and other, including similarity/difference, genuineness/artifice and authority/delegitimacy.

KEYWORDS: Linguistic Identity, tribal language, Kurux, Chhotanagpur, Migration.

Introduction

The language in the simplest way is one of the mediums through which human beings communicate amongst themselves. It evolves over a period of time and people living in a territory adapts with one kind of language. This for others becomes linguistic identity of that particular territory. Nevertheless, people have not been territorially static and have been on move and in the process, territories are often inhabited by newer communities forcing them to either adapt to one of the language or develop altogether a new language like in case of Urdu. These developments through movement of communities and individuals make others to assert their linguistic identities.

Later assertion and reassertion of different communities made linguistic map quite complex, as power of different communities even in one territorial unit seldom remained constant. The change in relative power of communities made one particular language dominant, subaltern or even redundant at times. The change in relative power often got determined by the domination over territory(ies) by global, regional or economic power.

Material and Method

The present paper is an attempt to trace formation and reformation of linguistics identity of a Jharkhand region of India. The work is based on primary and secondary data. Published literature, reports, census statistics and government legislations were used as secondary data, while primary survey of people speaking Kurux is used as primary data.

Jharkhand as invaded Land

Chhotanagpur plateau is in eastern India, in Jharkhand state. The region consists of administrative units of Ranchi, Hazaribagh, Palamu and Kodarma plateaus. Chhotanagpur region of India has undergone periodic change over last 200 years. The region was dominated by different tribal communities who had their own language, culture, political and economic system. The region saw intervention by Christian missionary and then British Empire. Later it became part of a state known as Bihar. Movement by different tribal groups for separate statehood resulted in creation of a new state in the year 2000. One of the major issues raised during statehood movement was the 'question of son of soil', which later was addressed as domicile issue. Though, it is really difficult to ascertain 'an aboriginal' or 'indigenous people' in the 21st century, general assembly of World council of Indigenous peoples passed a resolution stating that 'only indigenous peoples could define indigenous people (Corntassel 2003). As the self-identification is the most accepted practice, this study does not debate the possibilities of contestation about the aboriginal communities, rather this paper adopts constitutional definition as 'scheduled tribe'. When analyzing the characteristics of these scheduled tribe, one finds all four contents identified by Fred W. Riggs (1997) for indigenous people namely: (1) Cultural level, ranging from primitive to more complex, (2) Historical sequence, who came first and who followed, (3) political position, i.e. marginalized vs. dominant communities; and (4) geographical area (place).

The Chhotanagpur area is known for the concentration of industrial mineral and prime energy source i.e. coal. Owing to its rich natural endowments which resulted in industrialization, Jharkhand witnessed influx of huge population over the last century. The first modern factory was set up in the state in 1907 at a place

called Sakchi, which is now known as Jamshe dpur. It was not the industrialization that was reason for the invasion of the territory if I can use the word invasion. In 21st century it is difficult to call a section of population or say majority population of any territorial unit as invaders. However, the Jharkhand region remained a contested terrain for more than 200 years. It might not be debatable to use invaded in the sense of son of soil (Tribe), but surely it can be used for those who weeded out the then existing cultural practices, here language. Palamu and Ranchi district of Jharkhand are the set territorial limit for the present study.

A Brief history of the Study Area

Three major tribes namely Oraons, Cheros and Kharwars inhabited the area. Cheros dynasty ruled Palamu region (Daltonganj/Medni nagar) since 15th century. Prior to that Marathas inhabited the region. They are thought to be assimilated amongst aboriginals, i.e. Cheros. One can contest if Cheros can be called aboriginals, or they themselves were migrants to the region after Marathas.

Tribes in the region for long have external interactions. Traces of on and off Mughal interaction is documented, but it remained limited to the tax collection. British tried invasion for the first time in 1772. The Fort of Palamu was occupied. Afterwards, industrial and other economic opportunities attracted mainlanders to the regions. The formal and informal interaction continued.

Ranchi the current capital of Jharkhand was summer capital of the then state of Bihar and a notable 'hill-station' during 19th and 20th centuries. The city had a lunatic asylum and a tuberculosis hospital owing to the moderate climate on the top of the Chhotanagpur hills. 20th century saw huge influx of migrants owing to industrialization (e.g. HEC at Hatia) and expanding urbanization. Ranchi is a tribal dominated region. After formation of capital of the newly formed state of Jharkhand, it was made the capital of the newly created state Jharkhand. Since then administrative offices sprung up in larger share than the forest patches of the region. Continued urbanization and speculative land price have given rise to more and more people choosing to settle in the city of Ranchi sooner than later.

Languages in Jharkhand

Being home to multiple tribal communities, Chhotanagpur has been a multilingual society. Negotiations between languages of different tribal groups have been the key of communication amongst communities. Since urbanization, outsiders' language, in this case Hindi, became a bridge language and slowly the tribal language started going into the oblivion. Construction of linguistic identity remained sublimed till formation of state of Jharkhand, as Hindi and English became common language and also the language of market. If one wants to be employed in modern sector, they needed to learn any of these two languages.

The state of Jharkhand is home to three language families- IA, Munda and Dravidian. Over 96% of the population in Jharkhand communicates in tribal and regional languages at home. The tribal languages including Santhali, Ho, Mundari, Kurukh, Kharia etc. are spoken by about two-third (65.7%) of the population and regional languages such as Nagpuri, Khortha, Panchparganiya, Bangla, Odiya, Urdu, etc. are spoken by 30.6 of the population. Only 3.7% of the people communicated in Hindi as their mother tongue. The break-up of people who speak regional languages is 30.6%: Khortha (17.5%), Nagpuri (8.2%), Bangla (2%), Maghi (1.6%), Urdu (0.6%), Panchparganiya (0.3%) and Odiya

(0.3%).

There is significant variation in use of language inside home and outside home. Around 65.7% of the surveyed population use tribal languages as their mother tongue. These include Santhali, Kurukh, Mundari, Sadri, Ho, Oraon, Khadia etc. The tribal language used as mother tongue by largest number of people is Santhali (33%), followed by Kurukh (9.5%), Mundari (7.6%), Sadri (6.7%), Ho (5.6%), Oraon (1.1%). Khadia, Pahadiya, Birhori and Pachhiyari are spoken by around 2% of the population. A total of 19 major mother tongues are spoken by people in Jharkhand. Santhali, Khortha, Kurukh, Mundari and Ho emerged as dominant mother tongues in Santhal Pargana, North Chotanagpur, Palamu, South Chotanagpur and Kolhan Division respectively (Govt of Jharkhand, 2013).

Jharkhand assembly accorded second language status to 11 languages on August 30, 2011. Languages include- Mundari, Khadia, Ho, Kurux, Kurmali, Khortha, Panchpargania, Magpuria, Oriya, Bengali and Santhali. Urdu had already been recognized as the second language

Existing Language Practices in Field

Interestingly a reverse trend was witnessed in the field when the study was under way. People who left behind their traditional tribal language are returning to it. One such interesting case is of Kurux language. Converted tribal population never detached themselves from tribal cultural practices and hence kept their close ties to their language use through rituals. Need was felt and expressed by the tribal communities to return to the 'native' language in order to protect one's identity. Magazines like Nishkalanka, Adivasi Iur Adda, Sarna Phool Patrika, etc. started getting published. Even institutions started teaching tribal Languages. During the identity movement the existence and power of tribal languages was recognized by the educational institutions, NGOs and political parties alike. Contrary to other languages like Sanskrit where supply side factor is larger, for these languages demand based institutions came up. In 1980 'Tribal and Regional Language Centre' was established in Ranchi University that was still under the state of Bihar. It is interesting to recall that it was the time when statehood movement started. So to keep the fire low, measures like these were adopted. Prior to 1980s, courses and learning-teaching of a tribal language was viewed as futile. The tribal assertion ensured that these negative feelings have undergone a considerable change and institutions were instructed to respond to the local aspirations. Once assertion in political and social life became more visible, acquisition of tribal/regional languages were seen as means to provide cultural capital. At the same time these were also a measure to ensure peace. Nevertheless, languages in the classroom and outside remained different. Use of mother tongue in the classroom continued to fill nativity feeling and brought interest in students. Using native tongue provides a sense of security and helps learners to be stress free. This sense would have been a boon for school going kids. As time progressed, feeling on the line of 'son of soil' was on rise.

Confidence in the community was induced by a) Passing of the new language bill by Jharkhand government which offers five tribal languages Santhali, Ho, Kurukh, Mundari and Kharia and four regional languages Nagpuri, Panchpargania, Khortha and Kurmali along with Bengali and Oriya now get the status of second official languages in Jharkhand, b) introduction of tribal language tests in state services, c) tribal language test in the promotion/increment in the state services and d) right to use one's language for all official purposes. Demand for the formation of a Language Academy for promotion of regional languages has also come up.

Christian Institutions mellowed down in the sense that they started using local language. Earlier objections by the Christian Missionaries to use of bhagat, oraon, devi, kumari, etc. declined. The tribal population started receiving their due from the Church. The region felt a move towards drawing parallel in terms of culture and missionaries started propagating common identifiable thread with the local culture, e.g. Laal paad- safed saree incidence. In the wake of the new found social and political strength, strong opposition was put forward by Sarna tribal. Converted tribals even say that we have changed our faith, but our blood remains the same. The erstwhile feeling of superiority of tribal Christians seems to be on decline. They are asserting their linguistic and cultural identities like never before. Though, one can well argue that all these linguistic changes were brought in keeping in mind the aim of missionary expansion. The field study tells that the majority of the students enrolled in tribal language programs are tribal. They generally belong to poor socio-economic background. There is no significant gender gap noticed in their enrolment pattern. People outside state are also enrolled, often on disguised identity. It is noticed interestingly that the number of non-tribal students is on rise.

Discussions:

The introduction of language like Kurux at university level ensues from the political motives of few to further their political aspirations or to say satisfy certain genuine aspiration of people that used to come to surface time and again especially after creation of new state of Jharkhand. According to Census 2001, Jharkhand has 26.3 percent of tribal population. Among them, 14.5 percent follows Christianity, 39.8 percent follow Hinduism, 0.4 percent follow Islam and the rest follow the other religion including Sarna religion. This shows that followers of Sarna religion among tribes are around 40-45 percent. In this case,

although the Christians are in the minority in terms of numerical representation, they have a strong socio-cultural influence on the entire tribal population of the region.

The study suggests a complex mix of religion-culture interplay in use and propagation of certain tribal languages. Divisive and fragmented politics of identity is not new in this region. It has led to the disintegration of social norms governing through behavior and social relationships. The long term implications include religious disputes, and even demand of separate state on the basis of language, religion, and geography. The tribal of Jharkhand are caught up in one such controversy. Jharkhand has always struggled with the question of insider-outsider (Adivasi and non-advasi), but this divide among tribal in the name of faith is new and it remains to be seen what implications it will bring to the structure of tribal society in the state.

Identity connected with language has always been worthy for research. In Jharkhand, there was no threat of loss of tribal languages as there was sufficient incorporation of traits from dominant languages (Abbi, 1997). Church also played a role in making sure that these languages not only survives but flourish. The scripture distributed by the Church are often printed in these languages and in official ceremonies these languages are used rather than English. In recent times, in a proposition to conciliate the tribal's, the Jharkhand government has made acquaintance of at least one of the 4 tribal languages obligatory for its government executives. The 4 tribal languages are: Kurukh, Mundari, Santali and Ho. However, introduction of tribal language at university departments goes in consonance with the identity question. The learning from childhood in these regions is not in tribal language, though it is widely spoken (e.g. UNICEF report 2011). School text books are in Hindi; teachers are fluent in tribal language but are forced to teach in Hindi. The question is not about learning outcome or medium of teaching at school. Here the point is the introduction of tribal language like Kurux as a worthy subject to be taught at Graduate and PG level but not as a medium of instruction in primary school. The example from India suggests that on one hand Sanskrit that is not spoken is taught from class 6 up to PG level in mainstream education system and also in the special education system; while here is a case of a language that is spoken widely (second highest after Santhali in Jharkhand) but is not taught at school level and suddenly appears at UG and PG level. The common point in both cases is kind of identity formation of one or the other kind.

Conclusions

This paper argues that linguistic identity is produced out of social opportunities and challenges and the change in the status of some of the tribal languages in Jharkhand because of such interventions proves this point. Change in official status of tribal language has become instrumental in the spread and acceptance of culture and lifestyle that goes with it too. Tribal language study has affected the scenario as it exposes natives (who had distanced themselves from the language earlier) to unfold their culture and literature and induces a sense of belongingness to the language they speak otherwise. In the wake of the new job opportunities students from other states have been forging identities to get into the institution. This gives them a sense of security and possible job opportunities.

The attempts by educational institutions who were independently trying to realize the sense of belongingness of the population (psychological) could gain limited success, but the change in guard (state formation and recognition) brought about a sea change in the nature of takers of the subject.

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